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## *The Primitive Slavs*

121 The object of this study is to provide a fairly detailed account of the Slavs from their first appearance in history to their emergence in modern times as a group of nations akin in race and language, but diversified by the cultural and political influences to which they have been exposed.

[161] Numerically the Slavs are the largest linguistic group in
131 Europe, including some two hundred million people. Located
175* in the eastern section of the European Continent, they were long remote from the civilization which grew up on the northern shore of the Mediterranean, and thus were late in assuming an active political role. In early medieval times their lack of organization made them an easy prey to nations of higher material culture and more intense political aspirations; consequently the hostility between German and Slav is a historical factor of long standing. The geographical situation of the Slavs not only set them as a natural bulwark against nomadic invaders from Asia, but also exposed them to Asiatic cultural influences and to the infusion of alien blood. Their very numbers and their remote habitations retarded their cultural advance, as did also the domination of the unenlightened mass by an intelligent minority touched in varying degree by foreign
186 civilizations. Hence the absence of any pervasive tradition of
175* native culture has repeatedly prevented the development of

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ethnic or national self-consciousness and restricted the capacity of Slavic peoples either for self-government or for a resolute national effort in the critical moments of their evolution. Even those Slavs who live closest to the centers of European civilization and who shared its progress for centuries have often been debarred by economic and political factors from the enjoyment of a full national life, and those more distant from these centers have emerged from the Middle Ages only during the last 250 years. In the light of these facts, it is not surprising that the Slavs have often seemed an enigma to the Western world.

By virtue of their geographical distribution, the modern Slavs fall naturally into three distinct groups: Eastern, Western, and Southern. Of these, the Eastern is the most numerous. It embraces the Russians, who comprise two-thirds of the Slavic complex, and subdivide linguistically into three sections: first and most important, the so-called Great Russians, inhabiting the central and northern districts of European Russia; second, the White Russians (and here "White" has no political connotation whatever, but means light-haired) who occupy the area which borders on the northern part of the former eastern frontier of Poland, and, while centering in the neighborhood of Minsk, also run over into former Polish territory as far as Grodno, Bialystok, and Brest-Litovsk; and third, the so-called Little Russians (otherwise known as Ukrainians or Ruthenians), who inhabit the black-earth prairies or steppes north of the Black Sea from the western frontier to the Kuban and Don rivers. The Ukrainians, as present-day newspaper readers know only too well, also inhabit not only Volhynia and Eastern Galicia as far west as Przemysl, but also the extreme eastern tip of the former republic of Czechoslovakia, known as Subcarpathian Russia (now Soviet territory), and likewise make up a considerable part of the population of Bukovina (now also Soviet), an area which formerly belonged to Romania and which lies just south of the former Polish-Romanian frontier.

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It was to this district, centering about the city of Czernowitz, that many Polish officials and soldiers withdrew to escape German and Russian pursuit when Poland was invaded in 1939.

The Western Slavic group includes the Poles, the Czechs (or Bohemians) and Moravians, the Slovaks, and two Slavic islands in German territory: the Kashubs, who live on the Baltic coast northwest of Danzig, probably not over two hundred thousand in number, and a considerably smaller number of Sorbs, or Wends, who inhabit Lausitz, or Lusatia, a small area on the upper Spree river northeast of Dresden.

The Southern Slavs are cut off from their northern kindred by the Austrian Germans, the Magyars, and the Romanians, but comprise the Slovenes in the extreme northern part of Yugoslavia; the Serbs and the Croatians, who differ from one another only in slight variations of dialect and by the fact that the Serbs belong to the Greek Orthodox church and use the Cyrillic Script (similar to the Russian), while the Croatians are Catholics and use the Latin alphabet; and the Bulgarians who, though possessing a Slavic national language, represent a complex fusion of racial and linguistic stocks.

In view of the numerous and violent migratory movements which took place in northern Europe both before the Christian era and during the first few centuries after it began, the Slavs are hardly likely to have occupied their present extensive territory during their whole recorded history. On the contrary, their migrations cover a range almost as vast as those of their Germanic neighbors, and the location of their primitive habitat constitutes a problem which has long engaged students of Slavic history and linguistics.

The earliest native tradition dealing with Slavic origins is contained in the so-called Russian *Primary Chronicle*, a compilation completely extant only in two fourteenth-century texts, but which reproduce with considerable accuracy a work composed by a monk of Kiev about the end of the eleventh century. Here we read:

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the Scythians, but as distinct from them, a tribe known as the Neuri, who lived between the upper Dniester and the middle Dnieper rivers, and certain related Slavic place names indicate that they extended to the basins of the western Bug and the Vistula. This tribe is therefore generally regarded as Slavic, and on this basis it may be held with some certainty that the proto-Slavs as early as the fifth century B.C., and thus long before their dispersion, inhabited an area at least as far to the east as modern Kiev.

To the west it is not possible to place the proto-Slavic boundary beyond the Vistula, since all ancient historians mention this river as the eastern boundary of Germanic settlement. A further indication of this western Slavic frontier is the fact that the vocabulary of the proto-Slavs lacked a word for the beechtree, which grows west of a line roughly connecting Königsberg and Odessa, so that the Slavs were forced to borrow this name from their early Germanic neighbors. There is no good archaeological evidence to indicate that the proto-Slavs ever extended as far as the Elbe, though their medieval descendants reached it. Neither did they touch the Baltic, for the area north of the string of lakes and marshes which separates modern East Prussia from Polish territory was inhabited at the beginning of the Christian era by Baltic tribes akin to the present-day Lithuanians, who likewise occupied the basins of the Memel and the Dvina between the Slavs and the Gulf of Riga. Before the Christian era, the proto-Slavs were also separated from the Black Sea by a succession of Iranian tribes who occupied the southern steppe or prairie country, but they must have touched the navigable portions of the Russian rivers west of the Crimea, since Old Slavonic borrowed the Greek word for boat.

The habitat of the primitive Slavs before their dispersion was thus an irregular oblong area northeast of the Carpathians, extending eastward from the basin of the middle Vistula to the course of the Dnieper north and south of Kiev, bounded on the

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north by the rivers Narev and Pripet, and along its southern edge touching the headwaters of the Prut, the Dniester, and the Bug, which are all rivers flowing into the Black Sea.

The very origin of the names "Wend" and "Slav" is problematic. The term "Wend" has sometimes been regarded as connected with the Danish *vand,* the modern equivalent of Old Norse "vatn" (water), so that the Wends would derive this appellation from being water dwellers or lake dwellers. Though there are traces of Slavic lake dwellers, the difficulty here is that the name, being found in Pliny and Tacitus, is far older than any Slavic contacts with the Danes as such. For geographical reasons also, the earliest Slavic contacts must have been not with North Germanic, but with East Germanic tribes who (if we may judge by the Gothic vocabulary) used for water the terms "wato," without a nasal, or (in the case of a river or any body of water) "ahwa," akin to the familiar Latin "aqua." Efforts to correlate the name "Wends" with a Germanic word "wenden," to wander, so that it might signify "the wanderers," collide with the objection that both early East and West Germanic cognates of this verb simply mean "to turn," with no implication of wandering at all. Any connection with the Gothic word "winja" (pasturage) is to be rejected because of the absent dental (d), though there is abundant evidence to prove that the primitive Slavs were relatively skilful agriculturists and cattleraisers. Similarly, it is hardly possible to justify a connection between the name "Wend" and the Indo-European base **uen,* meaning "to strive, to wish, to love," even through such a derivative as Old Norse "vinr," friend. The Slavic etymologies proposed are even more uncertain, so that, for lack of anything better, the most reasonable supposition is that "Wend" is related to the early Celtic base "uindo," which means "white." It would thus appear that this was the appellation applied by the dark-haired Celts in the Danube basin to their blond neighbors behind the Carpathians, and this interpretation is the more appealing since there are pure Slavic tribal names of which the definition "white" or "blond" is a com-

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nations, the better they understand each other; witness the Poles and the Bulgarians, the Czechs and the Yugoslavs. But to say that living side by side no more ensures agreement among nations than it does among individuals is to state a commonplace.

Yet the reshuffling of the map did, nevertheless, satisfy the essential aspirations of the Slavs. It gave Yugoslavia her unity, Czechoslovakia her independence, Poland her liberty. But some irredentism still remained. Bulgaria claimed Macedonia (although she had lost it before the war). The Yugoslavs regretted that the Slovenes of Istria and Carinthia had remained outside the frontiers of their State, Poland remained in dispute with Russia on her Eastern Marches, and with Czechoslovakia in the Teschen Basin. The Ukraine question was assuming a fresh form and acuteness. Even after the recasting of Eastern Europe, there still remained seeds of discord between the Slavonic nations.

Much more; looked at as a whole, the new map seemed to be based on an age-long law which shuts the Slavs off from the sea. It was because it was cut off from all the seas that the original Slavia remained as unknown to the Ancients as Central Africa was to the Europeans of fifty years ago. One after the other the Scythians, the Sarmatians, the Goths, the Huns, the Avars, the Khazars, the Tartars, all barred them from the Black Sea. It was not until the eighteenth century that the Russians became effective masters of the northern shore of this sea. Similarly with the Baltic, where Scandinavian, Finnish, and Baltic peoples settled; until the Second World War, Leningrad was a Slavonic breach in Finnish territory. As for the White Sea, it was inaccessible to the Russians before the sixteenth century. The Finns, and perhaps the Lapps, had got in before them.

Now the 1919–1920 treaties took the Baltic territories and Finland from Russia. They refused Danzig to Poland, Fiume and Trieste to Yugoslavia. Following the coasts of the Baltic, from the borders of Esthonia to the Free Port of Danzig there was no real Slavonic port, even though the hinterland might be entirely populated with Slavs. On the Adriatic, the Dalmatian coast offered nothing but indifferent outlets, backed by steep slopes—and yet the hinterland was wholly Slavonic. The Aegean had no Slavonic outlet. The Slavs were allowed no possibility of becoming maritime powers, capable of rivalling the Germanic,

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Anglo-Saxon, or Latin nations. The treaties of the earlier war had thus sanctioned a traditional exclusiveness in this respect.

On the other hand, Slavism scored a point—the only one—in an acquisition of territory. This was achieved by the clauses which allocated to the Czechs Sub-Carpathian Russia—an ethnical mosaic, with predominant Russian or Ukrainian elements, which was to form an autonomous unit within the framework of the Czechoslovak Republic. This allocation, demanded by the Ruthenians of America, was decided upon chiefly because the signatories to the treaties considered the Prague government as the best mentor they could give to a dangerously backward Slavonic population. Indeed, Czechoslovakia was, within a few years, to improve Sub-Carpathia, that Cinderella of the Slavonic world; at the cost of heavy budgetary sacrifices, she turned this territory entrusted to her into a real 'Civilisation Front'.

As is well known, at the Peace Conference the Czechoslovaks intervened—another gesture of pure Slavonic inspiration—to try to secure for the Serbs of Lusatia the benefit of the protection accorded to minorities. These Lusatians are the remnant of a powerful tribe who people a corner of Saxony and Brandenburg, with its centre at Bautzen. Theirs was for long the *terra incognita* of the Slavonic world; they were discovered by the learned circles of Czechoslovakia and Poland in the nineteenth century.

The return of Poland to an independent life, and the Sovietisation of the Russian State, modified the nature of the relations between the two peoples. Immediately after the earlier war and the Treaty of Riga, one could not say that these relations had been clarified. It is certain that the Government of Moscow was then pursuing a Eurasiatic policy, which drew it away from European affairs. But no one could imagine that this disinterestedness would last very long. In Moscow they still, as under the Tsars, spoke of the 'Jesuitism' and the 'Jagellonism' of the Poles; in Warsaw, they talked about the hegemonic appetite of Russia, and her propaganda. 'Atheism' and 'Marxism' had replaced 'Orthodoxy' and 'Panslavism' as passwords.

The Polish-Sovietic War of 1920 complicated inter-Slav relations. The Poles bitterly reproached the Czechs with having refused

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homes after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. In Silesia, however, the persecutions incident to the counter-reformation caused the migration into Poland of some 200,000 Germans, who were responsible for the creation of the textile industry in western Poland. In eastern Poland as well, the German element played a prominent role. In 1648, for instance, when the Cossack Hetman Bogdan Chmelnitski, aided by the Crimean Tartars, threatened eastern Galicia, the German inhabitants of Lemberg paid one third of the ransom by which the city was saved, and German officers and soldiery fought on the Polish side in all the battles of the period.

Sweden came out of the Thirty Years' War greatly strengthened by the momentary possession of the mouths of the Oder, the Elbe, and the Weser, and its king, Charles X, thinking to gain the support of the Elector of Brandenburg for further conquests at Poland's expense, recognized him in 1656 as Duke of Prussia, thereby bringing East Prussia under the sovereignty of Brandenburg. Then, by the Treaty of Wehlau, the next year, the Poles surrendered their claims to East Prussia, thereby assuring the rising Prussian state of the undisputed possession of this area until the Seven Years' War, though it was returned to Prussia after the death of the Empress Elizabeth of Russia in 1762. Silesia was regained by Prussia the next year, the Vistula valley south of Danzig fell to the German share by the first partition of Poland in 1772, and the Posen area followed by the second partition of 1793. Such, then, in its broadest outlines, is the process by which the political frontier between Germany and Poland was determined prior to 1914.

Until the nineteenth century there was little racial hostility between German and Slav. The German expansion eastward during the Middle Ages had been dictated by religious and economic motives, and the conflicts in which Poland, as an independent state, was involved with its neighbors before the partitions were the result of dynastic ambitions and jealousies rather than of any collision of national ideologies. The practical services rendered to the development of agriculture, trade,

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So the signature, on February 10, of the peace treaty which (except in Dobrudja) maintained the territorial *status quo* of 1919, was made under protest—on the part of the Government, which, in an official note, expressed its hope of a revision of the 'unjust clauses' of the treaty; on the part of the Homeland Front, which invited the population to 'roll up its sleeves' and work to surmount the difficulties inherent in the application of the treaty; on the part of the Opposition parties, which, while they considered the treaty contrary to the spirit of the Atlantic Charter and to the terms of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements, yet blamed the Government for not having been willing to apply sincerely the Moscow agreements, nor to follow the advice of the 'democratic Great Powers'.

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Poland's fundamental problem in 1946 was the reorganisation and repopulation of the western territories taken from Germany and incorporated by Poland in conformity with the decision of the Potsdam Conference of August 2, 1945, and with the Polish-Sovietic treaty of the following August 17. 'Our western frontiers', said Wladislaw Gomulka, Vice-President of the Council, 'are essential to the maintenance of peace in Europe. Any one who opposes us in this respect threatens our most vital interests, and must be considered as our enemy'.

Three million Poles repatriated from Russia were to be settled in the western territories, where they would be joined by a million and a half Poles from the interior, taken from the over-populated districts, and a million and a half repatriated exiles. Out of four million Germans liable to deportation, 2,400,000 had already been settled in the Russian-occupied zone of Germany, and one million and a quarter in the British zone. So that the total movements of population affected more than seven million individuals.

Within her new frontiers Poland included 195,000 sq. miles instead of 242,875 sq. miles that she covered before the war; her population had fallen from 35,000,000 inhabitants to 23,620,000. She no longer had on her soil any national minorities; Germans, Ukrainians, Byelo-Russians and Lithuanians were to be repatriated, where this had not already been done. As for the Jews, their number dropped from three and a half million to 86,000. Poland, which had six neighbours before the

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war, now had only three—Russia, Germany, and Czechoslovakia. One aspect of her new position which represented an innovation was her transformation into a great maritime nation, thanks to the three ports, Stettin, Gdynia, and Danzig, and to her 312 miles of coast-line. Nevertheless, her destiny would henceforth be more closely bound to that of Central Europe, while remaining subordinate to the *entente* with Moscow.

The western frontiers were approved by the plebiscite of June 30, which covered not only the frontier-ratification, but also the abolition of the Senate and the economic organisation of the State (Agrarian reform and nationalisation of key industries). The first ballot gave 10,534,697 in favour and 995,584 against; the second gave 7,844,522 in favour and 3,686,029 against; the third, 8,896,106 in favour and 2,634,446 against.

This popular referendum did not have the tranquillising effects that had seemingly been expected. Poland continued to be a prey to 'terrorist' agitation, the repression of which, in turn, gave rise to scenes of violence and to exactions. While dissociating himself from the extremists, the leader of the Polish Peasant Party, M. Mikolajczyk, himself protested against the way in which the referendum had been carried out (except in Cracow, where the 'Noes' had been in the majority). So the British Government reserved its opinion on the legitimacy which this poll conferred on the régime, and awaited the general elections before giving legal recognition to the new state of affairs. And the whole of 1946 was taken up with exchanges of subacid notes between London and Washington on the one side and Warsaw on the other. The Anglo-Americans denounced the persecution to which the Opposition was subjected, and considered that the Polish Government was failing in the undertaking given in execution of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements, to guarantee the liberty of elections. But the Russians interpreted quite differently both the scope of these agreements and the meaning of the word 'liberty'. And so the most obvious result of the diplomatic offensive on the part of England and the United States was to intensify Polish-Sovietic solidarity.

The formation, in June, of a National Unity Government under the Presidency of M. Osubka Morawski seemed, for the time being, to dissipate the apprehensions of the Anglo-Americans, although the dissident Polish Government in London